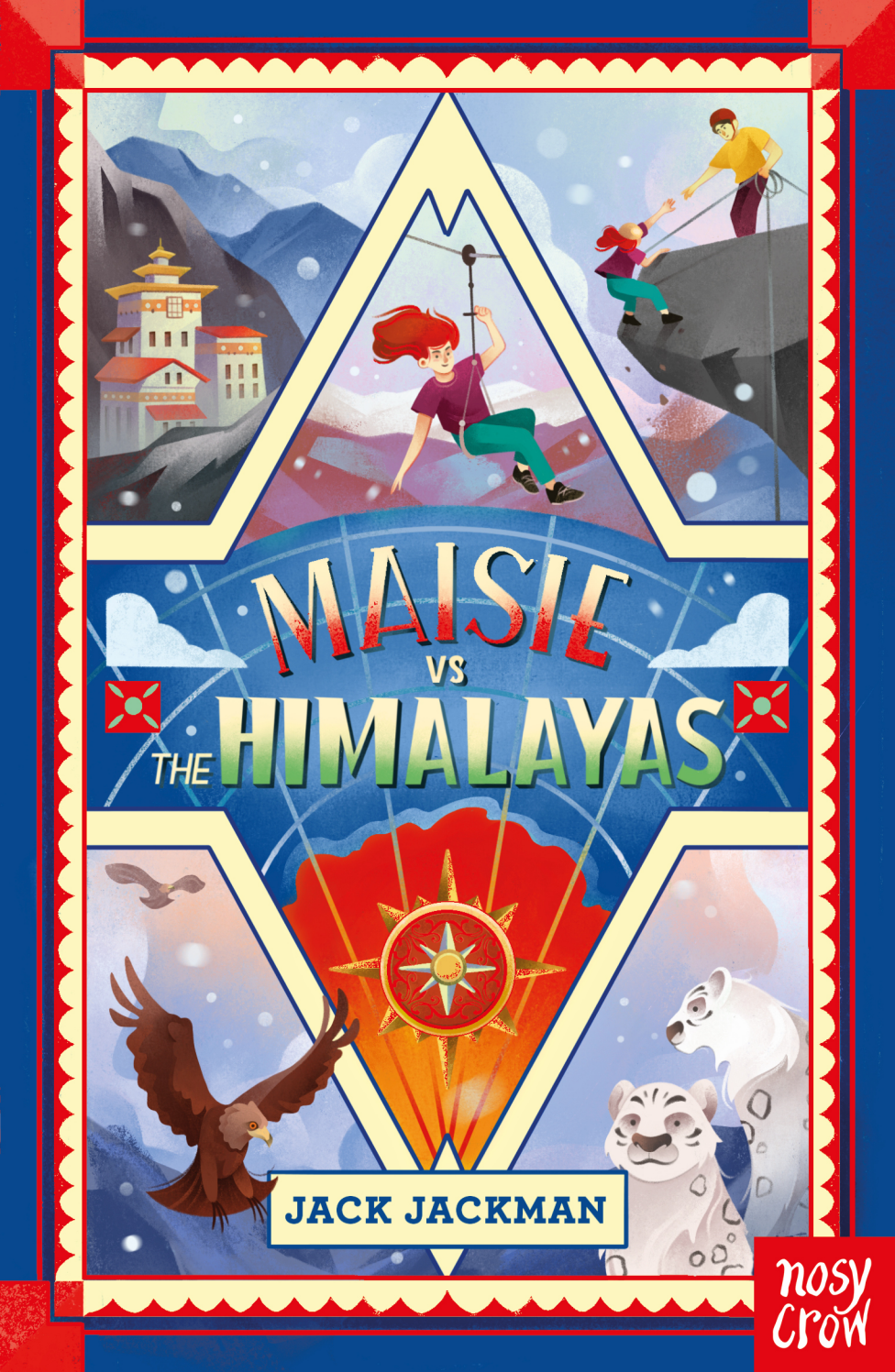

MAISIE
VS
THE HIMALAYAS
JACK JACKMAN
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MAISIE VS ANTARCTICA



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First published in the UK in 2025 by Nosy Crow Ltd
Wheat Wharf, 27a Shad Thames,
London, SE1 2XZ, UK

Nosy Crow Eireann Ltd
44 Orchard Grove, Kenmare,
Co Kerry, V93 FY22, Ireland

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ISBN: 978 1 80513 136 6

A CIP catalogue record for this book will be available from the British Library.

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A. following rigorous ethical sourcing standards.
Typeset by Tiger Media

Papers used by Nosy Crow are made from wood grown in sustainable forests.



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To all the Maisies of the world:
the day-dreamers
the "but why?"ers
the never-give-uppers
J.J.



How to Stop Time

Caves. I love caves. Dragons live in caves. Pirates hide treasure in caves. Every cave's got a secret passage guarded by a goblin, if you can find it.

OK, so clearly I've never been in a cave in my life. Unless you include the ones I make at home out of pillows. But I've read about them, so I'm almost an expert.

There's a cave on our local beach. It's called the Witches' Hole. They say no one has ever been inside, except for witches. The tide sweeps in and traps you there, and the only way out is on a broomstick.

Dad and I are going to be the first ones ever to

go inside. We stand on the beach where the rocks meet the sea. We're next to the Witches' Hole, but even at low tide, the sea flows right into the cave and you can't walk in. "I'm not sure, Maisie," Dad says. "It looks pretty risky."

The water's only about knee deep. Eating Dad's cooking is riskier than this. We're both researching caves for our books. Dad's writing his new **How to** book. I think it's called **How to Bore Your Daughter to Death**.

The book I'm going to write is much more interesting. It's called *Nyteshade vs the Zombie Ogre*. Zombie ogres live in caves, of course. So I really need to see inside one. "Can't we climb across on the rocks?"

Dad shakes his head. "Too slippery. We need rope. Rope and life jackets. I'll get some from the car." Rope is Dad's answer to everything. He ties his car to a lamppost to stop it getting stolen.

"I'll wait here," I say, "and think about the topology." I don't know what topology is, but Dad always likes it when I say stuff like that.

"I'll be back in a jiffy. Don't do anything silly." He strides away towards the car park.

There's no one else on the beach, which is not

surprising. It's one of those beaches with pebbles instead of sand, and there's always a gale-force wind, even in summer. My hair is flame-orange and bushy. Strong wind makes it look like my head is on fire. Not a good look.

When Dad's out of sight I turn back to the rocks. There's a big one sticking out of the water. It's kind of flat and green on top. I reckon I can jump on to it. From there I'll be able to see inside the cave. Just one little hop. Hopping doesn't count as being silly, does it?

Well, I say hop. I'm small for my age so it's actually more of a leap.

Turns out the rock is really slippery. No one could have predicted that. As soon as my foot touches the green stuff it slips. My other knee crashes into the rock and I fall into the water.

The cold water shocks me like it's made of electricity. It's absolutely freezing. It's only shallow so I hit the ground below, flailing madly. Jaggy stones dig into my legs. I try to scramble to my knees but a wave whooshes in and knocks me flat. The water crashes over my head.

Then the wave goes out. A thousand tiny watery hands grab my arms, my legs, my hair, and drag

me out with it, down, past the green rock, into deeper water. I try to gasp but when I open my mouth the water floods in.

There's only one thing for it. I'll have to stop time.

OK, quick pause here. I should've said, Dad and I can both stop time. I'm not supposed to talk about that. It's our secret. I've promised never to tell anyone.

Well, I can sort of stop time. After a bit everything goes black. Dad can do it properly, but he won't teach me how. He won't let me do it at all. Apparently I'm not old enough yet. I'm eleven. That's plenty old enough, right?

If I could do it properly, I'd roam the streets at night, fighting crime and rescuing lost kittens. Dad mostly uses it so we can stay up late to get my Maths homework finished.

Anyway, I promised him I'd never stop time unless it's a total emergency.

This is definitely a total emergency.

When I stop time, it's like I'm flexing a muscle in my brain I never had before. I can tighten it, like scrunching up my nose, but instead of my nose

moving, the world slows to a halt. (To be honest, my nose moves too.) I pull as hard as I can.

Time stops.

The watery hands instantly release me. The sea goes still. Seabirds hang frozen in the air.

Silence. I scramble to my feet, leaving a Maisie-sized hole in the sea. I take a step, and the water moves round my ankles like treacle. Huh. I've never been in water in stopped time before. I don't even think it's making me wet. Which would be helpful, if I wasn't already soaked through.

My vision starts to go blurry. Oh no, not already! I forgot, if Dad's close by then time stops for both of us. Stopping time for two is a hundred times harder. I can't do that for more than a few moments.

I'm still in the water. My stomach is clenching into a stone. I need to get out – quickly.

I'm going to pass out. And then throw up. Or the other way round. And then the waves will sweep me out to sea and my only hope will be that some random pirates find me and raise me as one of their own.

I take one step towards the beach, but that's as far as I get. Everything fades to black. My legs give out from under me and I collapse. The water

divides and I hit the rocks with a bump. Time starts again and the water crashes over me.

And then stops. My head clears. My stomach unties. I'm lying on my back, staring through the wave at a seagull hanging frozen in the sky.

It's Dad. Dad must have stopped time.

I can hear his footsteps crunching on the pebbles. It's literally the only sound in the universe. He wades into the treacle-water, grabs hold of me and lifts me on to his shoulder. Then he walks far enough into the cave to lay me down on the pebbly ground.

Time starts up again. The waves break, the seagulls cry. The sounds echo round and round in my head as I cough up the water I swallowed.

Dad is standing over me, a rope over his shoulder and worry on his face. I don't know why – we made it! We're inside the Witches' Hole! We're explorers in an undiscovered land. I sit up to take it all in.

Oh. It's hugely disappointing. No tunnels, no goblins, no dragon bones or pirate treasure. Not unless the pirates are hiding empty crisp packets and broken glass. It looks like people have emptied their bins in here. The smell is rank.

So much for that. I've got stains on my school

jumper that are more interesting than this cave. We're far from being the first ones here.

I look back up at Dad. He's going to be so cross with me. All just to see inside a filthy cave.

Caves are the worst.